

Editorial: Valley Caucus brings political parties together

By The Bee Editorial Board

The rules by which our lawmakers in the state Capitol play seemingly are made of concrete.

Chief among them: Democrats and Republicans are to stay in their own corners — and those that dare stray will be punished severely by their respective party leaders.

This rule is frustrating to Californians, millions of whom are more interested in results than ideologies and are neither as liberal as many Democratic legislators nor as conservative as many Republican legislators.

That's why we applaud the formation of the Valley Caucus, an alignment of lawmakers in the Assembly and Senate from eight counties in the heart of our state.

Thirteen representatives have joined the group; their number is sufficient to shape policy on important issues and perhaps inspire others in the Capitol to put down their talking points, escape their echo chambers and pull together to make the "California Comeback" meaningful to more than just the fortunate few.

According to Assembly Republican Leader Kristin Olsen of Modesto, the Valley Caucus grew out of state water bond negotiations last year.

By teaming up, Olsen said, the Valley's representatives were able to increase the funding for water storage in Proposition 1 from \$2 billion to \$2.7 billion.

Now the Valley Caucus is championing the use of some of that money for construction of the proposed Temperance Reservoir above Friant.

As Democrats and Republicans typically approach problems and potential fixes from different perspectives, Valley Caucus members will have many heated debates.

But the group has agreed to support legislative packages on three issues: water storage, reform of the Americans with Disabilities Act and higher education.

Their interest in water storage is powered by the need, in light of climate change, to capture more of the Sierra snow pack and water run-off in wet years. Without additional water captured, Valley farms and the environment will suffer.

Valley small businesses have been hit hard by unscrupulous lawyers who sue under the guise of helping the disabled; thus, the need for ADA reform.

And for the Valley to realize its economic potential, more residents must attend and graduate from college. This will supply employers in a broad range of industries with the skilled work force they need to succeed.

In addition to Olsen, one of the other key players in the formation of the Valley Caucus was Assembly Member Henry T. Perea, who has accumulated considerable power as one of the Legislature's [moderate Democrats](#).

The "mod Dems" meet as an unofficial caucus and have no paid staff, yet their power has grown as Republican influence has waned in California. Perea's experience with this group should help the Valley Caucus become a player in legislative outcomes and budget negotiations.

Our hope is that the Valley Caucus will identify even more common ground as it works to move our region forward.

